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SIPDIS

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FOR SA/PAB, SA/PPD (LSCENSNY, SSTRYKER), SA/RA, INR/R/MR,
AND PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/ASIA/SA/B (WJOHNSON)

CINCPAC FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR, J51 (MAJ TURNER), J45
(MAJ NICHOLLS)

USARPAC FOR APOP-IM (MAJ HEDRICK)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Iraqi Elections; Dhaka

Summary: All newspapers say that elections in Iraq will lack legitimacy and deepen the crisis. Pro Saddam "Inqilab" says the election will be identified as a black chapter in history.

IRAQI ELECTIONS

"The vote in Iraq"
Independent English "New Age" editorially comments (1/30):
Iraqis go to the polling stations today in what the United States sees as a decisive turning away from a horrible past and the rest of the world reflects on in nail-biting fashion. The crucial question now is whether the elections will produce the kind of political stability the occupying forces, led by Washington, have been looking for. A brief response to that question comes in a rather convoluted manner, which is that while the elections may yield a government America considers legitimate, the reality on the ground is that the political fragmentation in Iraq is too deep to be papered over by an uncertain election. Many in the West will expect Iyad Allawi's slate of candidates to win, and well he may. But, again, there is always the possibility of something different happening. The problem is that with so many competing forces out there, and this being the first electoral exercise Iraqis happen to be experiencing, it is hard to speculate on what might actually happen at today's voting.

"What is this Election in Iraq?"
Independent Bangla language newspaper "Jugantor" editorially comments (1/30):
The Interim Iraqi Prime Minister has also expressed doubt about what percent of voters that will cast their votes in elections. Tough security measures have been taken throughout the country. Airports have been closed, a curfew is imposed, and private transport is banned. All these measures have also panicked the general voters. International election observers are absent in Iraq. The credibility of elections in this situation will always be in question. A Shia and Kurd dominated general council will not be able to pave the way for democracy or freedom in Iraq. Elections that are being held in the face of Sunni resistance will create a new crisis. There is no controversy that Saddam's Iraq lacked democracy, but what the occupiers are doing in the name of establishing democracy will only deepen the crisis.

"Farcical Election in Iraq"
Independent Bangla language newspaper "Amer Desh" editorially comments (1/30):
At first, Iraq must be freed from foreign occupiers and U.N. peacekeepers must be deployed there in place of occupation forces to make elections meaningful. A meaningful election can only be considered under the direct supervision of the U.N. A democratic Iraq under the foreign occupation is an absurd thing.

"Farcical Election in Iraq"
Pro-Saddam Bangla language newspaper "Inqilab" editorially comments (1/30):
Occupiers have been trying to incite a civil war in Iraq. Iraq's future will plunge into serious uncertainty if their attempts succeed. Today's elections of farce and the "electoral" conspiracy will be identified as a black chapter in history.

Thomas